

# ***A Generation at Risk***

## **Children in the Central Asian Republics of Kazakstan and Kyrgyzstan**



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## Foreword

The people of Central Asia have always understood the importance of a supportive environment for children. In the traditional nomadic family, children, both boys and girls, were highly valued. During Soviet times, the indigenous family support for children was transformed with the establishment of heavily subsidized, comprehensive state systems for the provision of social services and social protection. Education, for example, was mandatory through secondary school and literacy was nearly universal. Both boys and girls attended school, independent of their families' economic means and social status. A well-funded system of pre- and afterschool care for children, including an extensive network of cultural, sports, and recreation facilities, encouraged children's well-being and growth. Other social services such as health were also widely available in both urban and rural areas. Family allowances and transfer payments from the state and enterprises encouraged families to have children and masked or cushioned the poverty faced by many in this relatively poor region of the former Soviet Union.

The collapse of the central planning system has resulted in an extremely difficult period for Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic. The countries are moving through a transition period, from being constituent regions of the former Soviet Union to being independent countries. This transition has demanded the creation of new political and economic institutions. It was accompanied by a severe depression until 1995 during which national income declined by about 50 percent and public revenues fell proportionally. The depression resulted in a sharp rise in the incidence of poverty and the emergence of problems such as unemployment and inflation, hitherto unknown in the region. Public services have been reduced drastically. Children have borne a major share of the social costs associated with independence and the transition to a market-oriented economy. Children's health and education indicators have worsened, and the comprehensive family support system has nearly collapsed.

The human development of a whole generation is at risk. Children today will likely receive far less investment in their human development than the previous generation. For some particularly

vulnerable groups their very survival is in doubt. For the new Republics, problems in facilitating better human development severely limits their potential and opportunities. To meet these challenges, the Governments in both countries have moved to develop policies and programs to support the development of children and young people. A beginning has been made, but only a beginning.

The Asian Development Bank has adopted a policy requiring that consideration be given to human development and cross-cutting social issues in program and project activities. The Bank, therefore, conducted two separate studies on the impact of transition on children in Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic. The studies were done in conjunction with drafting the Bank's country operational strategies and other work on gender issues and the social costs of transition. This book provides the results of the studies on children.

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## Acknowledgments

This book was prepared as part of the work done to draft the Bank's Country Operational Strategies for Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic. Its purpose is to generate awareness about the situation of children and young people in this difficult transition period in Central Asia. The report describes the impact of social and economic transition on children and young people, and analyzes the policies and programs of the Governments and other agencies towards sustaining the future of the children.

The book is based on two input studies prepared by a team of local and international consultants. The input study on Kazakhstan was staffed by a team of consultants, consisting of Alma Sultangalieva (children's socio-economic status), Mara Seitova (NGOs), Nailya Abtieva (statistics, education, local governments), and a research team (under Baurzhan Zhusupov) from the Kazak Center for the Study of Public Opinion. The team was led by Niña Boschmann from LUSO Consult, Germany. Ms. Boschmann is an economist specializing in employment policy, economic promotion, and gender issues. She has extensively researched and helped review policy on gender issues and labor market developments, especially in the transition economies of Eastern Europe and Latin America.

The input study for the Kyrgyz Republic was prepared by Janna Rysakova (economist and expert on NGOs), Djamilya Sopukeeva (economist), Altinai Usenova (economist and interpreter), Medet Sultanov (sociologist), Dr. Talaipek Djailoyev (physician and expert on children and poverty), and Zhanna Outunbaeva (expert on women and families). The consultant team was led by Kathleen Kuehnast as a staff consultant of the Bank. Ms. Kuehnast is a sociologist currently working at the University of Minnesota, who has conducted extensive research on gender issues in the Kyrgyz Republic.

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DAVID GREEN

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## Abbreviations and non-English Terms

\$	US Dollar (1 Som = \$0.082)
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ARI	acute respiratory infection
aul	extended family clan
ayran	fermented horse milk
CAP	Country Assistance Program
CARs	Central Asian Republics
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
COS	Country Operational Strategy
COSS	Country Operational Strategy Study
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DMCs	developing member countries of the Asian Development Bank
ESW	economic and sector work
EU	European Union
FINCA	Foundation for International Community Assistance
GDP	gross domestic product
GOSKOMSTAT	State Committee on Statistics
GTZ	German Agency for Technical Cooperation
HD	human development
HDI	Human Development Index
ILO	International Labor Organization
IMR	infant mortality rate
IUD	intrauterine device
kcal	kilocalories
kg	kilogram
KLSS	Kyrgyz Living Standard Survey
KMPS	Kyrgyz Multipurpose Poverty Survey
MCL	minimum consumption level
MLSP	Ministry of Labor and Social Protection
MMR	maternal mortality rate
NatStatCom	National Statistical Committee
NGOs	non-governmental organizations
oblast	province

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PRC	People's Republic of China
raion	district
SSS	specialized secondary school
TA	technical assistance
TB	tuberculosis
TACIS	technical assistance program of the EU for the former Soviet Union and Mongolia
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Emergency Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organization
WID	women in development